
The Alaska Comfort One Program

Information for Patients and Families

Overview

Some individuals who are terminally ill do not wish to have life-saving measures, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), performed when their breathing and heartbeat stop.

In October, 1996, Alaska law and regulations first established the Comfort One Program to help health care providers identify terminally-ill people who have expressed these wishes. In addition, the Program establishes a protocol for health care providers to respect these wishes once the person has been identified as being enrolled in the Program.

A standardized enrollment form and wallet card, which are obtained from a physician, alert health care providers that a patient has been issued a valid Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order, and that CPR should not be performed, or should be stopped when the identification is discovered. This is particularly helpful for prehospital emergency care providers, such as Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics, who often must make a split-second decision whether to start CPR.

A DNR order is different from an advance health care directive, formerly called a “living will.” Advance health care directives are designed to allow a person to express his or her wishes regarding life-sustaining treatments and other medical and personal care before he or she becomes unable to make treatment decisions. A directive to withhold CPR may not take effect

until the person has been determined to have a qualifying condition (terminal illness or persistent unconsciousness) and a doctor signs a DNR order. Enrollment in the Alaska Comfort One Program establishes that the patient has a terminal condition and wishes not to have CPR performed. By preventing unwanted resuscitation efforts, the Program provides benefit to patients and their families, as well as to health care providers, during the time surrounding the patient’s death.

A terminally-ill person who is considering enrolling in the Alaska Comfort One Program should discuss this Program and the preparation of an advance health care directive with his or her physician.

A Do Not Resuscitate order is different from an advance health care directive, formerly called a “living will.”



A person who is enrolled in the Comfort One Program can purchase a bracelet from his/her physician or from the regional EMS Council.

Enrolling in the Comfort One Program

To enroll in the Alaska Comfort One Program, a patient must have a terminal condition and must complete a simple form which is obtained from the patient’s physician. The form must be signed by both the patient, if able to do so, and the patient’s physician. The top copy of the form is kept by the patient and the second copy is retained by the physician for the patient’s medical file. The remaining copies may be provided, by the patient or physician, to other health care professionals, such as hospice workers and/or the dispatch center of the local fire department/emergency medical service.

Proof of Enrollment

At the time the physician enrolls the patient in the Comfort One Program, the patient is given a copy of the enrollment form and a wallet card. These should be kept in a visible or easily accessible location.

The patient may choose to purchase a Comfort One bracelet. Bracelets are only available to those enrolled in the Comfort One Program and are particularly useful for patients who travel outside the home. Bracelets may be purchased through the patient’s attending physician or from the regional EMS Council.

The Comfort One form, wallet card, and optional bracelet serve as proof to the health care provider that the patient is enrolled in the Program.

Emergency Medical Care

If a health care provider finds evidence that a patient is enrolled in the Comfort One Program and confirms the patient's identity, the health care provider will not start CPR. If CPR was begun before it is determined that the patient is enrolled in the Program, CPR will be stopped.

If the health care providers are unable to confirm that the patient is enrolled in the Comfort One Program, they will provide emergency medical care, including CPR, according to their normal guidelines.

The Alaska Comfort One protocol does not affect the provision of medical care other than CPR.

A person may revoke his or her status as a Comfort One patient at any time. For example, the person enrolled in the Comfort One Program may destroy the wallet card and form, and not wear the optional Comfort One bracelet. The patient should notify his or her attending physician that such actions have been taken, to avoid any confusion in the event the health care providers contact the physician for advice. Patients who are receiving care from Hospice organizations or from other health care providers should notify these personnel of the revocation as well. In addition, the patient may communicate the intent to revoke the Comfort One status directly to the health care provider.

Other Related Programs

Some emergency medical service agencies and fire departments in Alaska have programs which can provide additional services to those enrolled in the Comfort One Program. In most circumstances, these programs inform law

enforcement, medical, and other key personnel of an expected home death, to provide for the least intrusive response. People interested in these types of services should ask their physicians to contact the local fire department or ambulance service for additional information.

For more information about the Alaska Comfort One Program, contact the Alaska Section of Community Health and Emergency Medical Services at (907) 465-3027 or visit its website at http://www.chems.alaska.gov/EMS/Comfort_One.htm.

Comfort One forms are provided to physicians by:

Southern Region EMS Council, Inc.
6130 Tuttle Place
Anchorage, AK 99507-2041
(907) 562-6449/FAX: (907) 562-9893

Interior Region EMS Council, Inc.
3522 Industrial Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99701
(907) 456-3978/FAX: (907) 456-3970

Southeast Region EMS Council, Inc.
P. O. Box 259
Sitka, AK 99835
(907) 747-8005/FAX: (907) 747-1406

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Revised 5/05

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